
LIGHTHORNE PARISH COUNCIL

Annual Review 2005

Welcome to the first annual review of the new, smaller, Lighthorne Parish Council following the splitting off of Lighthorne Heath Parish.

How did the Split go?

Following the split, Cllr Rigby was elected chairman once again for the new, smaller, Lighthorne Parish Council, with Cllr Tait being elected to the post of vice-chairman. Cllr Giblin, who had been vice-chairman prior to the split, was elected chairman of the new Lighthorne Heath Parish Council.

At this year's annual meeting of Lighthorne Parish Council, Cllr Rigby stood down as chairman (though he remains a councillor) and Cllr Rose was elected in his place. Cllr Tait was re-elected as vice chairman.

Lighthorne Parish Council continues to hold regular monthly meetings on the second Wednesday of the month. Lighthorne Heath Parish Council holds its meetings a week later (and an hour earlier).

There have been a few teething troubles, but the preparation that was put in has been amply rewarded. Some of the funds for 2004/05 from Stratford District Council (SDC) which should have been paid to Lighthorne Heath Parish Council were, for various reason, paid to Lighthorne Parish Council instead, but our advance financial planning meant that these were recognised and quickly transferred.

Where we did hit problems was in the area of grass-cutting. Those who attended the Annual Parish Meeting have already heard the details of this and had a chance to ask questions, but there follows a summary.

What's up with Grass-cutting?

To start with, SDC chose to split the grass-cutting allowance for the old Lighthorne Parish equally between the new Lighthorne and Lighthorne Heath Parishes, although in reality the majority of the expenditure had always been in Lighthorne. This has meant a shortfall in our budget for this year.

While this situation would normally be relieved next year (due to the way the allowances are calculated), we also learnt that SDC is now considering the complete withdrawal of this support right across the District. If they do, the impact on us will be significant. To cover the cost of grass cutting at the present level the parish precept would need to increase by 70%. (There is a financial summary later in this review.)

We were unable to find a contractor willing to continue cutting the grass in Lighthorne, due partly to the fact that there are many individual areas of grass to be cut, some are quite small and some slope rather heavily. We have also had a number of complaints from villagers about the timing of cutting, and from previous contractors about the time taken dealing with those complaints and also requests for other areas to be cut. We hope that those reading this review will recognise that it is the Council who draws up the contract, and changes are costly to make before renewal...

It was agreed to give responsibility for the contract back to SDC, but only after this happened did we learn that SDC had reduced their quality standard. Also, despite carefully updating the contract map, we then found that some areas of the village were not cut at all.

To recover the situation we found a contractor who was willing to cut the remaining, by now overgrown, areas. Of course, all this has added to our costs.

What was done Last Year ?

Lighthorne Sports Association: There was a major water leak on the cricket field which caused Severn Trent to present us with an invoice for nearly £7000. After much negotiation the bill was reduced to £144.

Highways: Continuing concern over speeding through the village was discussed at the Annual Parish Meeting following a presentation from Stephen Rumble, communications manager of the Warwickshire Casualty Reduction Partnership. He told us that, in response to our request, speed through the village was being monitored. He said that, if it was found to be too high, Lighthorne would be considered for one of the exceptional camera sites. However, he said that all such sites in Warwickshire together only receive 9 hours per week of camera time. Other possibilities, such as speed indication lights, were discussed as well.

Following the monitoring period we learned that traffic was indeed travelling fast enough for us to qualify for an exceptional camera site. A survey to find a suitable site for the camera has also been completed and we now await the first appearance of the camera vehicle.

Those wishing to learn more about the Warwickshire Casualty Reduction Partnership can ask the Parish Clerk for some literature or go to www.smilecamera.co.uk.

Planning: The inquiry into the District Local Plan is over. Many of our arguments were accepted and should appear in the new plan when it comes up for public consultation shortly. However, national planning policy is changing and we are keeping a very close eye on developments in this area to try to ensure we are not caught out.

We received only 15 planning notifications this year, a third of the number received by the old parish. Just over half of the applications related to tree work in the conservation area. We did not respond to every one, but when we did we always replied within the time allowed.

We continue to attend regular community liaison meetings with Ford (Land Rover and Aston Martin's parent company).

Government: We responded to two consultations this year, one from Postcomm on the review of Royal Mail's management of the Postal Address File (PAF) and one from the Standards Board for England on proposed changes to the Code of Conduct for Members. We have not yet heard the outcome of either consultation.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 gave new powers to Parish Councils. It gives us direct powers to create offences relating to the control of dogs. It also classifies Parish Councils as litter authorities, giving us powers in respect of controlling litter, graffiti and fly-posting. However, the exact mechanisms by which we will be able to exercise these powers will be conferred by Statutory Instrument, and the government is still conferring on the consultation process to be used to discuss these instruments. This means that it will probably be another year before we are able to use these powers.

Summary of Finances

Our 2003/04 accounts (for the old, larger, Lighthorne Parish) passed audit without qualification or comment of any kind. Arrangements for examining the final 2004/05 accounts, the first for the new parish, have been posted on the village notice board.

The old Lighthorne Parish Council's annual precept for 2003/04 was £11,000. For 2004/05 the same amount was requested, but with a recommendation that it should be split equally between the two new parishes. Thus the new Lighthorne Parish received £5,500.

This summary of the draft accounts shows you how the money was spent:

We received:

Precept (Council Tax)	£5,500
Grass-cutting Allowance	£1,740
Interest on Investments	£435
	<u>£7,675</u>

We spent:

Administration	£2,018
Grass-cutting	£2,623
Insurance	£1,396
Post Office	£575
Grants / Donations	£528
Repairs / Maintenance	£295
Street Lighting	£237
Sports Association	£30
	<u>£7,702</u>

Overspend: (£27)

It is not very meaningful to compare this year to last year as the circumstances are so different, but we are very pleased that we came so close to break-even. This is because, of the two new parishes, it is Lighthorne which has the higher costs as we have many more assets. Indeed, this was recognised before the split and so a larger portion of reserves were allocated to the new Lighthorne Parish and a certain amount of maintenance work was brought forward and completed before the split. We have spent the minimum possible on maintenance this year, but this level cannot continue for long (see below).

For 2005/06 we requested no increase (for the third year running) and asked for £5,500 once again. As it turns out, the tax bases for the two new parishes are nearly, but not exactly, the same. You will see on your council tax statement that this means that we in the new Lighthorne Parish are, in fact, paying a small increase in the parish component. However, this amount is just 31p a year for a band D household. (For your interest, although those in Lighthorne Heath were pleased to see a decrease, it was only 2p!)

Our annual band D precept of £23.69 is well under the District average of £37.39. Even if we do have to ask for an increase next year, as seems likely, we will still remain a low-cost parish.

What about the Year Ahead?

Our plans are as follows:

Maintenance: Baker's Hill Well needs to be surveyed and may very well need some remedial work. At the very least there is some painting to be done.

The grass cutting must be brought back under control using a contractor who has a pride in the appearance of the village.

Forming a "Garden Army" would be a good way to increase pride in our village and, if all goes well, pave the way for us to consider once more entering the Best Kept Village competition next year. The more people who volunteer the less any one person will get called upon to help, so please consider getting involved in our community in this way.

Highways: We will look at providing street name-signs for those roads currently without them and to replace the existing ones. This will depend on finding a suitably low-key design at a price we consider reasonable.

Traffic calming remains a concern and we will continue to work with the Warwickshire Casualty Reduction Partnership to ensure that the 30mph speed limit is enforced.

Government: We will respond to the consultations on the Statutory Instruments which will give Parish Councils their new powers under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. We will also consult with you, our electorate, on how we might make use of those powers to improve our environment.

We shall be attending meetings with SDC and many other parish councils in the area, organised by the National Association of Local Councils, to discuss grass-cutting refunds.

Planning: We are currently examining the Countryside Access & Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Warwickshire. We will respond to the next consultation on the District Local Plan, and to any other similar documents.

A Word from the Retiring Chairman

I should like to say thank-you to Cllr Rose for allowing me space here to make a short personal statement.

I decided not to stand for chairman again this year as the split has been completed, the new Council is stronger than ever, and I feel that it's time for a new hand on the tiller before I get too stale. I'm not leaving the Council, just stepping into the background in the hope that I'll have more time for other things. I know that I leave the post in excellent hands.

A Word from the New Chairman

Mike Rigby has served the parish well in his years as Chairman of the Council. He ensured the Councillors worked together in the best interests of the two parts of the old parish in a period when we all knew the aim was a parish split. To achieve the split Mike battled with District and National bureaucracy with extreme diligence and patience.

I am very pleased Mike is staying on as a Councillor.

I look forward to my time as Chairman.

Cllr Tony Rose, Chairman
26 July 2005

Who are the Parish Council ?

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For Parish Council information on the web go to <http://www.lighthorneonline.com/PCHome.htm>

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